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UNCLAS CAIRO 008700

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

NSC STAFF FOR SINGH

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DETAINED BLOGGER RELEASED; AUC STILL STYMIED IN  
EFFORT TO OVERTURN AZHAR BOOK BAN

REF: CAIRO 8498

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

1. (SBU) Blogger Abdul Karim Nabil Soliman has been released after spending more than two weeks in the custody of Alexandria's State Security Investigative Service. Abdul Karim announced his November 13 release with a post on his blog ([www.karam903.blogspot.com](http://www.karam903.blogspot.com)). Aside from his post, Karim has kept a low profile, declining so far to meet with the media. A leading Cairo-based blogger with whom we spoke opined that the vigorous campaign of e-mails to the GOE and other governments by Internet freedom advocates in Egypt and abroad had played a role in pressuring the GOE to release Abdul Karim.

2. (SBU) In another freedom of expression controversy reported reftel--the case of Al-Azhar's ban on an academic monograph on the history of the Wahhabi movement by Georgetown University scholar Natana De Long-Bas, 1000 copies of which the American University in Cairo sought to import for distribution in Egypt--Al-Azhar appears to be sticking to its guns, despite a formal request by AUC that Azhar reconsider its position. In a November 15 report in the weekly "Aqeedati" (published by Al-Gomhoriya newspaper), AUC reportedly has said that it will continue to urge Al-Azhar to withdraw the ban on the book. In the same article, author De Long-Bas has announced her willingness to debate publicly the book with an Azhar official, and so that she could prove that it an objective and respectful study. Al-Azhar has not responded to De Long-Bas's offer.

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